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ABSTRACT

To examine the most important changes in marketing and advertising of the decade from 1976 to 1986, more than 100 people were interviewed, and their responses were fashioned into an oral history modeled on the technique used in Studs Terkel's popular books. Among those interviewed were advertising and marketing professionals, as well as casual observers. Although the decade in question was perceived as a dynamic period for advertisers, marketers, and consumers, one pioneer in advertising education felt that there had been no significant creative changes in his 40 years of teaching, but rather that the effect of the electronic revolution on marketing and advertising in general has been profound. One pattern in the interviews identified the importance of the progress induced as a by-product of the new technologies, i.e., segmentation, target marketing and direct marketing made possible by computer sophistication. One person interviewed considered the most distinctive characteristic of the decade not change itself but the ability of both businesses and people to adapt to change. Many interviews focused on the ways advertising and marketing adapted to shifts in consumer attitudes and demographics--increased use of humor in advertising, ways to break through to the jaded viewer/reader, and the maturing of the baby boomers as well as the U.S. population in general. Displaying a consensus of tone, most interviews stressed optimism and accommodation by advertisers, marketers, and consumers. (NKA)

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CHANGES IN UNITED STATES ADVERTISING 1976-1986

(a la Studs Terkel)

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ABSTRACT

The decade 1976-1986 may be identified as the most significant period in the history of United States marketing and advertising. To evaluate this "recent history," some business professionals plus some more casual observers were asked to name the one or two most important changes in marketing and advertising during the past decade. Their comments are examined against contemporary literature to provide background to what amounts to an oral history of the period.

CHANGES IN UNITED STATES ADVERTISING 1976-1986

(a la Studs Terkel)

What's happening in advertising? Is advertising changing in the United States? Specifically, have major advertising changes taken place in the past decade or so?

Advertising giant David Ogilvy has written that since he "set up shop on Madison Avenue in 1949 . . . there has been only one change that can be called major: television has emerged as the most potent medium for selling products."

The demographic changes in the American marketplace in recent years are widely documented. Some people feel the recent 1976-1986 period may be identified as a most significant period in the history of United States advertising and marketing.

To identify how marketing and advertising have changed, we interviewed more than a hundred people, asking the following question: What is/are the one or two most important change(s) in marketing and advertising of the decade, 1976-1986? In this paper we included a small sample of the answers.

A model for this kind of oral history relayed in an interview form is Studs Terkel. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 1985, Terkel records history in the words of those who live it. Terkel always uses a theme--the Depression, for instance--and then he talks to a cross-section of people not only on how the Depression is

remembered but of the effect it had on their lives. "It has to do with memory," says Terkel, "and I hope that along the way a pattern is formed." He selects a variety of people to interview and then confronts their memories with a direct question.

Yet Terkel is providing a valuable, albeit not perfect, service. The only way of finding out what people think is by asking them. He is also right that it is important to look for patterns. "History," wrote Thomas McCraw, "is a search for patterns." What then if people are asked about the recent history, and not to relay facts but opinions? And what if the answers were written down verbatim--no editing? You would get an understanding of what people remember. Patterns would form.

For purposes of this paper we searched for patterns to explain a piece of history that is not quite history. We are not going to provide a litany of demographic and psychographic statistics. Our intent is far more personal. What we are trying to do is examine how advertising and marketing have changed over the past decade through the words of people who were there, who observed the changes. While many of our interviews were with advertising and marketing professionals, others were with more casual observers: a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist, a college journalism student and a stand-up comic, for instance.

As Studs Terkel does, we sought out interesting people, who were likely to say interesting things. We contacted not only those people we knew, knew about, or were referred to, who were likely to observe changes in insightful ways but who also were likely to react

to those changes in insightful ways, either as professionals or casual observers.

Because everyone's views reflect the ways change affects them, we felt it was important to identify the subject and quote the answer directly, that paraphrasing would have a deleterious effect on the literal and personal meaning of the words; and it was precisely that we wanted to capture. This technique provides a contemporary look at how advertising and marketing fit into society.

But what about what has been written about changes in advertising and marketing over the past decade? An examination of contemporary literature was then necessary to provide background to what amounts to an oral history. The answers of our interviewees are connected by related information in magazines and journals. This background also provides the paper with a continuity as patterns develop in the interviews.

Name: Bryant Hodgson
Age: 44
Vice president and sales manager, Techtron Imaging Network, Chicago, IL

Corporations are being forced to take a short-term view partly because of the enormity and rapidity of change--but they are also fading in their commitment to build equity in a brand, which is inherently a long-term process.

In addition, retailers are more powerful today. With the advent of optical scanning, retailers and manufacturers have instant feedback on what is selling. And perhaps more importantly what is not selling. So there is a lot of pressure on people to do the expedient and move goods--trade allowances, deals, discounts--and usually at the expense of advertising funds.

There has been a decrease in the influence and effectiveness of advertising. Why the decrease? The population is smarter and better educated and less influenceable and much more skeptical now. People are not blindly loyal to a product just because it's advertised.

We are seeing a more sophisticated consumer. Advertising is being viewed as a means of information. Product puffery, acceptable a few years ago, is being rejected by the more serious consuming public (Russell & Verrill 1986). James H. Naber, president of Glendinning Companies, one of the largest sales promotions companies, said in a speech at the University of Illinois in October, 1986:

> During the past 10 years there have been some remarkable and fundamental changes in the way that major advertisers spend their marketing budgets--budgets which in the aggregate will approach $150 billion in expenditures during the current year in the United States. Of course there have been numerous tactical changes involving media selection, copy development, ethnic advertising and many more.
>
> But one major spending shift both in the aggregate and in most of the individual major company budgets is the reallocation of substantial funds from the advertising sector to the sales promotion sector. Very simply, 10 years ago advertising represented about 60 percent of total spending and sales promotion 40 percent. Today this picture is reversed, with sales promotion representing about two-thirds of every marketing dollar spent and advertising roughly one-third.

Name: Mike Peters
Age: 44
Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and creator of "Mother Goose and Grimm" comic strip, Dayton, OH

> As a cartoonist the thing I'm amazed at is the number of 15-second ads. It shows more and more--as cartoonists have known for years--that you can express a full-fledged idea in a few seconds. It's really kind of fascinating. When I grew up the standard was the one-minute commercial, then the 30-second ad. Now it's 15-seconds. When you draw a cartoon you have the reader for three, four, maybe five seconds. If they don't understand what you're trying to say in that time, you're going to lose readers. The same goes with an ad.
>
> I think over the last few years ads have become more and more non-ad ads. Like the Calvin Klein ads. You look at the picture and you have no idea what they're selling. You see two people leaning against a wall and drinking a soda, and the ad is for blue jeans. This is really wonderful. You draw in the reader or viewer with an ad that doesn't look like an ad. That's what grabs your eye.

Both the 15-second ads and non-ad ads are so far playing to dubious viewers in Peoria and getting mixed reviews on Madison Avenue. U.S. News and World Report said the 15-second spot came into play as a way to beat clutter and zapping: make commercials that involve viewers so immediately that they find them interesting enough or funny enough or simply weird enough to stay tuned ("Stay Tuned America" 1986, p. 53). But Ed McCabe, president and creative director of Scali, McCabe and Sloves advertising agency, called the ads "a profit-making ploy on the part of the networks" (April 28, 1987 article in Variety). And advertising executive Jerry Della Femina said the ad business was acting like sheep and blindly following the wishes of the networks. If the networks decree that four-second spots are "in" as a way to squeeze more advertising and profits into commercial advertising, "We'll do four-second commercials," Femina said (Variety article).

Hal Riney, chairman of Hal Riney and Partners, a San Francisco advertising agency, referred to the spots as "'Reader's Digest' summaries." Jack Smith, vice chairman and creative director at the Leo Burnett agency, says 15-second spots should communicate a single message, such as "cures headaches faster," while leaving additional claims about not upsetting stomachs to 30-second spots. "It's important not to try to do too much," he says ("Now We Pause 1985, p. 75).

What about non-ad ads? Calvin Klein broke ground for the non-ad ads when it began selling jeans by ignoring them. But is it effective? Video Storyboard President Dave Vadehra sees the trend positively. "It's indicative," he says, of advertisers weaning themselves away from traditional category formats:

> We used to have slice-of-life advertising for detergents, product-as-hero advertising for automobiles, and graphic demonstrations for over-the-counter drugs. Advertisers thought that if it worked for the brand leader, it would work for them. It didn't. Viewers told us they get confused and tend to credit the brand leader. To imitate the leader is to advertise him. That's why so many advertisers--Stroh's, Calvin Klein, Wendy's and Crest, for example--broke the mold (Kanner 1984).

Name: Bill Burkhardt
Age: 55
Director of consumer marketing services, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co. (3M), St. Paul, MN

We are increasingly slicing the marketplace into finer and finer pieces of opportunity.

It's the advent and presence of direct marketing that taught everyone how to target. Through direct marketing techniques we have learned to isolate clusters --to manipulate data so as to identify consumers into groups in ways they are similar. Direct marketing taught us to stop treating everybody alike.

Today direct mail is the third most important advertising medium. Only newspaper and television reach a larger audience. Historically, the recent surge into direct marketing coincided with a number of other developments: (1) the adaptation of computer technology for compiling mailing lists (and hence the efficient, affordable system of segmentation); (2) the widespread use of credit cards so that both ordering and payment are simple and relatively safe; (3) the toll-free 800 number which provides an immediate means for handling both consumer inquiries and orders; (4) the zip code system which offers an extraordinarily cheap way to sort lists--much faster than alphabetically sorting through telephone or city directories; and (5) societal factors, especially the working woman with a new level of income but less time for shopping. It is the two-income family which most often responds to direct-response offers (Montgomery 1984).

Name: Julie Stein
Age: 25
Stand-up comic, North Hollywood, CA

There's more use of humor in advertising. The average viewer retains water longer than he does a 30-second commercial--so by delivering a message in an entertaining way, whether it's funny or just mildly amusing the message is retained longer by the viewer. Remember the Russian beauty pageant commercial Wendy's did? That sold a lot of hamburgers for Wendy's--not to mention french fries and milkshakes--though I don't know how well it would've played in Gorky Park.

That was a Joe Sedelmaier commercial, I think. He also directed the Federal Express ads and some of the better ads on television. He's an absurdist making a mockery out of traditional commercials. There's a marked difference between what he's doing and what's being done on some commercials. It doesn't work when someone rips

off a clever line and then tries it somewhere else. It's important to be the first one there.

There's also a margin of offensiveness that must be considered when trying humor in an ad. Obviously some products don't lend themselves to humor as well as others. Humor probably isn't fitting for a Preparation H ad.

And some ads take themselves too seriously and could afford to lighten up a bit. Like the "ring around the collar" commercials. Is this really a serious problem facing the world? War, hunger and "ring around the collar," right? Do you know anyone who really gets upset over this? And some of the ads are a bit overstated. Someone uses Bounty to clean up a spilled drink and is then surprised: "Wow! It works!" Why? What's a paper towel supposed to do, anyway?

Hal Riney said that television advertising "is talking about nothing most of the time." (See April 27 Variety article). He cited the example of paper towel products to support his contention that a lot of advertising is much ado about nothing. Whatever the advertising says about the different brands, Riney said, consumers can "get along fine even with the worst paper towel." What becomes the challenge for the creators of advertising in the U.S., says Riney, is "How do you keep saying the same thing in a new and fresh way." (Variety article)

Market researchers McCollum/Spielman found that people remember--and are more easily persuaded by--tongue-in-cheek spots than by, say, ads with real people testifying or celebrities pitching. But McCollum also found that certain subjects--money, property, and death--are not to be treated lightly, and suggests that banks, realtors and insurance companies would be wise to play it safe. Prudential tried a "Heaven Can Wait" approach but abandoned it after stumbling upon the truth of the McCollum theory (Kanner 1984).

Name: Betty Jo Taylor
Age: 52
Owner of a marketing communications agency, Dallas, TX

The big change in advertising is in tone. Today television is serious. Even when advertising is funny, the advertising is serious. Today advertising is focused. In the past advertising--especially on television--was sometimes frivolous and very entertaining. Today people use entertainment to involve the viewer but McDonald's is always about McDonald's. Product is hero. More than ever.

Several years ago "I can't believe I ate the whole thing" became part of the language--but apparently it didn't sell enough Alka Seltzer. The campaign earned high marks in awareness but Alka Seltzer moved to a new agency who produced more serious, more focused advertising. In the 1980s ads turned increasingly to the family--a turn from the Me Decade of the 1970s, said Dave Vadehra, president of Video Storyboard:

> With the current breakdown in the American family, it's as if advertisers are trying to idealize the family and give people what they're missing in real life. Remember how the movie musicals of the 30s showed life the way people wanted it to be instead of the way it actually was? I think that's what's happening here. This is also quite a change from the my-kitchen-is-the-tidiest, hard-sell school of advertising. Most of (the best ads now) almost lack a product story. They're soft. The sell is the family--or humor (Kanner 1984).

Name: Richard Samuel West
Age: 34
Publication director for SANE peace group, committee for a nuclear free world, Washington, DC

> Advertisers are trying to effect a more natural, less uptight attitude in advertising. Humor is used to do this.
>
> Also the youth market has changed. The celebration of youth has been primarily targeted at adults --making people want to be associated with the young but also the very young. Take designer jeans. Not just the young are being marketed but the old and the very young. Six-, eight- and ten-year-olds are encouraged in an attitude of buying as if they are 20 year olds. The change toward more humor is very good. But I think the change toward targeting to children is very disgusting.

In a Newsweek magazine article a year ago, a spokeswoman for a clothing retailer that is ambitiously courting the very young said: "Pre-school children know fashion. They've been exposed to MTV and Madonna even before they can talk and walk" ("Targeting the Tots" 1986). One four-year-old girl made no bones about her lack of convention: "I love being gaudy," she said. Newsweek magazine commented that on Madison Avenue the girl represented one of the most sought-after demographic groups in years: pre-schoolers. Children under six are not only influencing purchasing decisions but also are becoming consumers themselves, and that's leading marketers to the profitable discovery that pre-schoolers are materialistic too. The number of working mothers is steadily increasing and more discretionary income is available to be spent on toddlers. "The pre-school segment will grow significantly over the next several years," says Yves Coleon, president of Quantum Marketing Association and a specialist in children's marketing ("Targeting the Tots" 1986).

One of the most visible marketing companies clearly aiming at pre-schoolers is Esprit. Formerly mostly a direct-mail catalog operation, the company shifted to department-store boutiques and opened its own stores. One of its campaigns begun in early 1986 aimed at children under ten. The models are supposedly real people and the copy provides names, ages, grades and short interviews involving the children's attitudes toward their relationships with the opposite sex, their current social activities and their career goals. Children are touching each other, often in a physical embrace. One five-year-old girl hugging a three-year-old boy says the following: "Quentin and I just met and he started singing to me right away. He could be a writer because he has such a big imagination and likes telling funny stories. When I'm older I want to be a woman because I like to go everywhere by myself."

Name: Jane Dunlap
Age: Over 50
Public relations consultant, Wilmington, OH

One of the most important things is the specialization of media which really makes target marketing possible. And targeting may be the most important recent development in marketing. In earlier times the business of business was manufacturing. It was the role of the sales force to sell whatever the plant manufactured. Whatever. Targeting reversed all that.

In the September, 1986, issue of INC. magazine (p. 37), marketing consultant James McManus said: "Most companies focus too much on the mousetrap and not enough on the mousetrap buyer." He suggested that the business of business today is defining markets, quantifying

markets, consumer behavior and identifying consumer needs, and then matching people and skills with money in order to fill those needs. He insists that there are no engineering-driven businesses, no financially-driven businesses. None. He believes that fundamentally all successful businesses today are market-driven.

Name: Mark Hanshaw
Age: 2
Democratic Party political director for State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, OK

During the election campaigns the candidates' television spots were generic. You would see the candidate and his wife and kids and dog walk together on the beach. The ad wouldn't say anything about the issues, it would just say the candidate stood for family and dogs and that sort of thing. It was safe. It was American.

Another thing I think that has been significant is that it's been the Ronald Reagan decade. Products are sold with patriotism--on bumper stickers, billboards, and television. "Buy American." You see it in car ads and beer ads. Drink beer, be an American.

Scores of U.S. companies are trying to cash in on the belief that many U.S. customers, fed up with foreign competition, prefer to buy American-made goods. The resulting buy-American marketing drive drapes Old Glory around everything from frying pans to panty hose. All the flag-waving in the world won't erase the U.S. trade deficit, of course. Customers insist that product quality and price are the most important elements of their purchasing decisions. But there are signs that pocketbook patriotism influenced both sales and marketing late in the 1976-1986 decade.

Name: Ron Taylor
Age: 36
Advertising department head, University of Tennessee

The Reagan elections affected American business in a substantial way. The Reagan administration loosened up the role of government to let the marketplace be more in control. During the Reagan years we have seen big shifts in the roles of the Federal Trade Commission and in the Federal Communications Commission. The interpretation of deception and product claims substantially has been less stringent and many people believe settlements under Chairman James Miller have been more favorable to advertisers than during other administrations of either the 1960s or 1970s.

I'd also list among important changes the growth of mail order--or direct marketing, to use a more precise term, since so much of this business involves many other means of ordering and shipping beyond the United States mail system. During the past decade direct marketing has been a dynamic growth area.

An obvious example of the growth in direct marketing is L.L. Bean. Founded in 1912, the company's annual volume was less than four million dollars when Leon Leonwood Bean died in the spring of 1967. Under the new leadership of his nephew, Leon Gorman, the company adapted to computers, developed mailing-list expertise, added an 800 number and the use of credit cards. Gorman pushed volume to $20.4 million dollars in 1974. By 1981, sales were $172.3 million and beyond $225 million in 1983 (Montgomery 1984). Another successful direct marketing company, Lands' End, reported a net income of $21.6 million and a sales volume of $227 million in 1986--the profit level was up 68 percent from the previous year and sales were up 32 percent ("Lands' End a Beacon 1986).

Name: Julie Henry
Age: 26
Copy director for an advertising agency, Knoxville, TN

The way women are presented in ads has changed. It used to be that housewives would be in a kitchen and a male voice would tell her how she could do her housewife duties better. Now you see a man and a woman together in the kitchen and the woman is the one who knows what's going on. Women, generally, are portrayed better than they were. You see women as professionals, as equals with men. You never used to see that before. There is more equality than there used to be but it could get even better.

Ads are also trying to make people--particularly women--feel good about being in their 40s. You can be 40 and look good, or 50 or 60. Older women in ads are seen as attractive and desirable. And I think there will be more of this as the average age in the U.S. rises, as the baby boomers get older. Ads will change to keep pace with them. Advertisers have definitely been targeting the baby boomers. One change in television advertising is the music used in commercials. It's 60s music, which is targeted directly at the baby boomers.

Marketers have never faced a brighter opportunity than the coming of age of the baby boom, wrote Fortune magazine on October 15, 1984. There is strength in sheer numbers. It is estimated that by the year 2000, twenty-five percent of the nation's population will be between the ages of 45 and 64 (Michman 1984). The pitch has always been to the young--this probably will change more and more as marketers continue to go where the action is. With actresses like Joan Collins, Linda Evans and Catherine Deneuve leading the way, it's increasingly okay to be a woman and be middle-aged. On January 28, 1985, Newsweek wrote that Madison Avenue has added a new wrinkle to selling good looks. Cosmetics is finally coming of age--and for an

obvious reason: baby boomers are getting older and the beauty brokers don't want to be left behind.

Name: William Locander
Age: 43
Distinguished chair of marketing, University of Tennessee and president-elect, American Marketing Association

Marketing and advertising are moving into new areas--the health care field, the whole spectrum of professional services, all kinds of cultures and subcultures. Professional advertising used to be taboo for architects, hospitals, accountants, bankers, doctors. Now all of them have strategic marketing plans, and marketing expertise is being developed in many sections of the economy.

And just about everybody in business has embraced application of new technologies and the creation of new products, out of the new technologies--for example, teleconferencing, electronic banking, new media in mass communication.

And one must acknowledge the high level of creativity coming into play. Just consider the use of humor. Who'd imagine selling raisins by television--a spot in which raisins dance rock 'n roll to the tune of the 60s song, "Heard It Through the Grapevine"? High-quality creativity is a way to break through customers suffering from a communications overload.

With viewers growing ever more jaded, commercials have to sell themselves before they can sell their products. Humor is a way of doing this. Director Joe Sedelmaier has parlayed humor into successful television ads for Wendy's, Federal Express and even the Illinois State Lottery. After a decade of relative solemnity in advertising--the wisdom was that funny ads didn't move the product, as Alka Seltzer's funny yet ineffective spots demonstrated--it seems that Madison Avenue is in

a laughing mood again (Kanner 1984). Video Storyboard's 1983 list of its top twenty-five commercials included ten that intended to provoke a giggle; two years earlier, only four touched the funny bone (Kanner 1984).

Name: Lisa Legge
Age: 23
Senior in journalism, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

The change has been in the use of rock video. MTV turned on the young years ago but videos aren't just for the young anymore. They're used to attract older adults and the real young--everyone and they're everywhere. Look what MTV did for rock music. Now videos are being used in all facets of society including advertising and marketing--particularly advertising and marketing. Videos are used in commercials and television and movies. Everything is a video.

Along with booming sales for VCRs are sales for personal video cameras, home movies and now videotapes. We are in the movies now. Marketers haven't ignored this. Forbes magazine wrote in May, 1985, that the newest marketing wrinkle in pizza parlors didn't have anchovies or extra cheese but did have something customers liked better: themselves. Pizza parlors are taping softball and football games and then showing them back on a large-screen television for the paying and playing customers. VCRs have brought about the zapping of ads but they've also brought about a new kind of advertising and marketing. Companies are turning to videocassettes to sell everything from camera to exercise equipment to travel packages. Says Ronald Katz, media

concepts director for J. Walter Thompson in Chicago, "These advertisers are at the starting gate in a tremendous race" ("Pushing Products" 1986, p. 129). The explosive growth of videocasette recorders has transformed them into an attractive advertising appliance.

Name: Rebecca Lamb
Age: 21
Senior in marketing, Miami University, Oxford, OH

Because of VCRs and cable, commercials are getting zapped. When people watch what they've taped they skip the commercials so commercials aren't having the impact they once did. Their messages aren't getting through. Advertisers have had to come up with different methods to get their messages across.

In a July 29, 1985 article, Business Week reported that jolted by high-cost TV spots, companies are advertising their wares in unlikely places. Parking meters are one place. In New York City, electronic ads light up in front of taxi passengers; in sports stadiums, giant video screens display ads to fans; and in supermarkets, shoppers' carts are plastered with tiny billboards. "There's no question that more of our ad dollars are going to nontraditional media," says George Mahrlig, Campbell Soup Co.'s director of media services. Campbell currently spends about $1 million on alternative advertising, compared with virtually nothing five years ago ("'Ad Space Now Has" 1985, p. 52). This trend has attracted a number of new media companies; they know they will never take over the role of television but are convinced that the cost issue will spur their growth. Moreover, they claim to offer unique

advantages, especially for marketers targeting a specific segment of the population. The alternative media companies are also benefiting from changing lifestyles. For example, as more women leave the house to work, advertisers find they can no longer reach them through daytime television. "As there is less opportunity to reach women through television, our media mix is changing," says Jay Uhlmansick, director of advertising services at Drackett Co., a Bristol-Myers Co., subsidiary ("'Ad Space Now Has" 1985, p. 52).

Name: Richard Joel
Age: 67
Retired: Pioneer in advertising education at Emory University, the University of Wisconsin, Florida State University and The University of Tennessee

First I would insist that in my 40 years of practicing and teaching advertising there have been no significant creative changes. There have of course been significant changes in advertising vehicles but the ways that people are informed and persuaded have changed hardly at all. Today there are all kinds of radio--as opposed to one kind of radio in the 1940s, and market segmentation helped create specific communication vehicles such as magazines called Yachting, World Tennis or Opera News. And there are newsletters for all kinds of hobbyists, people who collect old postcards or comic books or antique jewelry. Then there are the "new media" such as cable and the interactive television called teletext. So major changes in marketing have evolved through new media buying and new technologies. The effect of computers on media buying and target marketing is well chronicled. So I'd list as a most significant change the effect of the electronic revolution on marketing and advertising in general.

My second selection would be the industrialization of Japan--and its accompanying effect on manufacturing, logistics and marketing in the United States. Not too many years ago "Made in Japan" stamped on a product usually meant shabby, low quality, inexpensive and cheap. Now Japanese products mostly mean the opposite. We're

even copying their methods! Because of Japanese competition a number of American industries have simply shut down while others have revolutionized their systems as well as their products.

American companies are cooperating with the Japanese to learn how to produce more efficiently. Our trade imbalance has made it necessary to make changes in the way we go about business.

In the November-December, 1986 issue of Harvard Business Review, flexible automation systems are discussed by Ramchandran Jaikumar, who acknowledges that since 1975 U.S. managers are buying the hardware of automation but using the systems poorly. Jaikumar believes: "Rather than narrowing the competitive gap with Japan, the technology of automation is widening it further."

According to polls and surveys, consumers are concerned about the nation's economic future and lack confidence in their own ability to maintain their present standard of living. Consumers appear willing to deny themselves the goods and services they have already acquired but are prepared to make modest cutbacks in consumption (Michman 1984, p. 61). Business Horizons called this the voluntary simplicity market, and said marketers are able to reach this segment by advertising in specialty magazines. The reported readership of some magazines directed to the voluntary simplicity market is as follows: Americana, 1,000,000; Back Packer 396,000; Country Journal, 800,000; Early American Life, 927,000; The Family Handyman, 2,900,000; Mother Earth News, 3,000,000; Organic Gardening, 3,125,000; Prevention, 4,113,000; and Workbench, 1,600,000 (p. 61).

SUMMARY

Among the interviewees there was a strong affirmation in perception of the decade as a dynamic period for advertisers, marketers and consumers but one of the older interviewees felt the rate of change was not significantly different from earlier periods: "People always say the time period just past was marked by the most changes ever."

Another interviewee said the most distinctive characteristic of the decade was not in change itself but in the ability of both business and people to adapt to change.

At the beginning of the 1976-1986 decade the advertising/marketing community believed cable and other kinds of new electronic communications would heavily impact advertising. Instead, test market results of new media like interactive television are inconclusive and local programming and advertising for cable are still primitive.

It had been expected that the "change" interviews would provide descriptions of the importance of technological changes during the decade. Instead, one pattern in the interviews identified the importance of progress provided as a by-product of the new technologies, i.e., segmentation and target marketing and direct marketing are developments made possible by computer know-how.

Interviews also focused on the ways advertising and marketing adapted to shifts in consumer attitudes and demographics--the increased use of humor in advertising, ways to break through to the jaded viewer/reader, the maturing of the baby boomers as well as the U.S. population in general.

There's also a consensus of tone in most of these interviews. Both younger and older interviewees are upbeat in their views of change during 1976-1986. There's no trauma, no gloom and doom. The interviews seem to stress accommodation by advertisers, marketers, and consumers.

In 1975 the late John Crichton, long-time president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, looked back and described the 1950s as "a period of growth unparalleled in our history . . . a period of great buoyancy and confidence."

What kind of time have we just experienced in advertising and marketing? It's perhaps premature in 1987 to evaluate United States advertising during 1976-1986, but later the period may well be viewed as a most significant period of positive adaptation by both consumers and advertisers. That's the major pattern in these observations about exploring a piece of history that is not yet quite history.

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